

If there's one issue that impacts each of us on a daily basis, it's the price of gas. With the national average of a gallon of gas passing four dollars this week, filling up at the pump is becoming an incredibly expensive proposition.

In fact, in my tele-town hall meeting on Wednesday, energy was the number one issue on the minds of constituents by an overwhelming margin.

It's about an 80 mile drive from Montross up to Washington and I make the roundtrip several times a week - nearly every day that Congress is in session. I understand in a very real way that, for many of you, driving significantly less isn't an option; you have to drive to get the kids to school, get yourself to work and to tie up the loose ends of daily life. So, while driving less can provide some relief, it is far from a cure-all.

In Washington, I support several initiatives to provide long term, sustainable relief and responsible energy development. While I also strongly support the development of new energy technologies, alternative and renewable fuels and greater conservation and energy efficiencies, I realize that it is going to take time to be independent of fossil fuels. Until then, the world will continue to rely on oil and gas as a bridge to a carbon free energy future. Consequently, I think it's important that we increase domestic production to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and increase supply by eliminating red tape that discourages refinery construction.

When I posed the question to hundreds of constituents on Wednesday evening, 85% of respondents favored domestic energy production. I share this sentiment and am working daily with all of my colleagues in Congress to promote several efforts to increase American made energy. Currently, I'm supporting legislation that would allow us access to the estimated two trillion barrels of oil shale resources in the US, much of which is concentrated in our Western states. I've also signed onto a bill to employ environmentally responsible methods to tap into the estimated 10.8 billion barrels of oil from a very small area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Energy production in ANWR would include the most stringent environmental safeguards and would only disturb 2,000 acres of the South Carolina sized refuge. Additionally, I'm in favor of efforts to unlock some 86 billion barrels of oil, plus 420 trillion cubic feet of clean burning natural gas contained in the Outer Continental Shelf also under the most stringent environmental controls using the best available technology.

As we all know, drilling alone will not meet our growing energy needs. We cannot drill our way out of our current energy dilemma. That's why it's critically important to encourage development of clean energy sources like wind, solar and hydroelectric power and to reduce our consumption through conservation. Environmentally friendly power production and conservation must play an exponentially increasing role in our energy policy. We must continue to aggressively support research and development of these resources. We should use the fees and royalties collected by the U. S government on fossil fuel production and put that directly onto the development of technologies for alternative and renewable fuels to assure a stable future after the depletion of fossil fuels.

We also need to be more efficient in refining oil into petroleum products. Increasing energy production without improving refinery capacity will only create a bottleneck in the supply line. To reduce the cost of refining oil and, subsequently, the price at the pump, we need to cut bureaucratic red tape that currently stymies construction and increases in refinery capacity.

Skyrocketing fuel prices are placing serious pressure on our families and our economy. America will continue to compete for energy in the global market with developing nations like China and India, so it's critical that we not ignore the vast resources contained within our borders. While there's no silver bullet for gas prices, there are clear cut actions that Congress can take to develop a comprehensive energy policy that allows this country to use all of its resources in an environmentally responsible way and aggressively defines our future after fossil fuels. This will allow us to alleviate some of the upward pressure on fuel prices and set us on the road to energy independence. I will continue to work in Washington to support these efforts.